

The man who hopes to put some sense back in Soccer

ONE RELAXED sweep of Brian Lee's arm embraced the ancient Abbey of Bisham, the old stables converted into his personal residence, and the Thames curving against the turf of his National Sports Centre.

'And Bournemouth,' he said, 'could not begin to understand how I turned down the job as their manager.'

Bournemouth are not alone. Soccer has a tendency to regard Soccer as more important than the quality of life, in some chronic cases as more important than itself.

Three other clubs were equally amazed by Lee's summer refusal to abandon his satisfying work as director of the Bisham Abbey Sports Centre, his successful pastime as manager of non-League Wycombe Wanderers, his status as a local justice of the Peace, and the serenity of rural Buckinghamshire for the rat race of the Football League.

JEFF POWELL

continues his series on the new season



Resented

He is beset by one serious problem: 'How to stop the youngsters who come to the Abbey and the lads who play for Wycombe from copying the rubbish they see the First Division stars dish up on television.'

Lee would prefer to think he could influence the new season for the better. Yet he suspects that criticism from outside, however constructive, is resented by the human ostriches who treat League football as their personal property.

That much he learned during Wycombe's run of

success in last season's FA Cup.

Lee took that opportunity to make a few trenchant observations about the morality of top Soccer. Managers telephoned from all over England to leave Lee in no doubt that he was a menace.

Unabashed, Lee today nominates the qualities he

would like to see illuminate the new season: 'Honesty, sportsmanship, enjoyment.'

Honesty? 'The game can ill afford to lose men like Bill Nicholson,' says Lee. 'He did not try to tell people that the rubbish they were watching was good football. It is sad to see Ron Greenwood accept that West Ham must compromise their principles and move upstairs to let it happen.'

Sportsmanship? 'We proved in our small way at Wycombe that it's not necessary to kick people and shout at referees. None of the teams we played in the Cup can complain we knocked them about. And we had only two players booked in winning the Rothmans Isthmian League.'

Pleasure

Enjoyment? That lad Chris Kelly at Leatherhead was a classic example of how the part-timers get more pleasure out of the game. He couldn't stomach League football at Millwall. We have Steve Perrin going to Crystal Palace this season but I've warned Malcolm Allison that if he doesn't enjoy his football the way we do then he'll come straight back.

'I don't think he could really take in what I was trying to tell him. We treat players as human beings, considering their jobs and their families and as a result finding them eager to play and train.'

'In the League they call themselves full-time professionals, which is a joke for the amount of time they put in. And all they do is moan and groan about the physical strain and the mental pressure. They are not complete people.'

Declined

Bournemouth, who went for Lee after losing to his team, and Jack Charlton's Middlesbrough were among the sides who found it no pleasure to play Wycombe last season. Middlesbrough should have lost at Wycombe, a performance Charlton blamed on the Loakes Park slope. They won a home replay with a solitary goal in the last minute. At the time Lee told his players they had no chance. Now he is prepared to admit: 'I only said that because I had to. There was no percentage in telling them the truth.'

'I had been to see Middlesbrough play at Everton, two of the top

three teams in the First Division at the time. It was absolute rubbish. How could I tell my players it was worse football than we played every week?

'The standards in the First Division have declined because there are not enough superior players to go round. So teams like Middlesbrough and Everton exist on method, yet method is crushing the talent they do possess.'

Confident

Lee believes negative methods have given coaching a bad name. 'Coaching,' he says, 'is about encouraging whatever natural ability a lad is blessed with. But even schoolmasters are more concerned with producing winning teams than good players. I would like to see the FA abolish most of the competitive football at schoolboy and youth level.'

The professional clubs

Lee and Bournemouth

JEFF POWELL quotes Brian Lee (Wycombe Wanderers) as saying he had turned down the job of manager of Bournemouth.

Never at any time has this club offered Brian Lee the job as their manager and we have

never had any discussion with him about such a job.

Harold Walker (Chairman), AFC Bournemouth.

Brian Lee explains: 'I was offered a job with a League club AFTER we had played Bournemouth but not WITH Bournemouth.'

do not escape Lee's anger that talent is being wasted at a time when the game is crying out for young men who can kick a football in a straight line.

'Bertie Mee addressed a conference I attended and said Arsenal covered 11,000 schoolboy and youth matches the season before last. That produced 60 lads for trial, of whom six were signed. Of those, two have already fallen by the wayside but he confidently expected one of the boys to make the grade.'

'Bertie was trying to show how thorough they were. But I ask you: one player out of 22,000 they watched? Is that something to be proud of? It strikes me as an indictment of the system.'

Inspired

Can football beat the system this season? Perhaps, with the help of honesty, sportsmanship and enjoyment.

The very mention of

these old-fashioned virtues will have many modern professionals falling about laughing. If they pause for breath, they may realise that a start was made last season by the team who won the Championship.

'Darby,' says Lee, 'gave us all something to cheer. Dave Mackay was a great player and an inspiration to his team. He told his good players at Derby nothing more than to go out and play inspiring football.'

Problem

'That proved that enjoying the game doesn't damage your chances of winning things. The problem is the fear of what it can do at the other end of the table.'

By now the First Division should have learned that the worst three teams will be relegated anyway. They might as well give us a little pleasure in the process.